

## Defining a Community Health Worker

### Who are community health workers?

Community health workers help people access healthcare and social services. They are typically [members of the communities](#) where they work and share factors such as life experiences, language, ethnicity and/or socioeconomic status with the populations [they serve](#). As frontline public health workers, CHWs increase patients' health knowledge and self-sufficiency through outreach, community education, social support and advocacy. They can [bridge gaps](#) between under-resourced and medically underserved populations and the healthcare system by building trusting relationships with their patients.

CHWs support patients, and sometimes their families, in navigating complex systems by meeting patients where they are to address each patient's needs individually. A vital link between health and social service programs, [CHWs facilitate](#) access to housing, food or transportation and provide chronic disease education.

As a key part of a patient's care team, the CHW can increase the team's awareness of any healthcare access barriers, while building knowledge and respect for the patient's background and culture.

### The many roles of community health workers

Outreach and education

Supplementing healthcare services

Chronic disease health education

Coaching

Patient advocacy

Cultural mediation

Care coordination

Social services navigation and referrals

**Ultimately, CHWs bridge the gap between the care team and the patient, providing support for unmet needs.**

### The impact of community health workers

By increasing patient engagement and care team collaboration, CHW programs can produce meaningful and measurable results and [lower health systems' costs](#). For example, a [community health worker intervention](#) focused on reducing exposure to indoor asthma triggers reduced asthma symptom days and urgent health services use while improving caregiver quality-of-life scores. Through reductions in urgent care use, the intervention saved between \$185 - \$334 per child. A hospital using the CHW care model reported quality improvement gains such as improved medication adherence and reductions in

length of stay and emergency department visits. Additionally, CHW interventions, such as weekly visits, can help to lower medical costs by [reducing readmissions](#) and emergency department visits for non-emergency needs.

Sample workday of a CHW	
8:00am – 9:00am	Review patient list, check for ED visits/admissions, respond to referrals, update progress notes and prep for visits for the day.
9:00am – 9:15am	Morning team meeting.
9:15am – 9:45am	Patient 1 – connect patient with dental provider; call and schedule appointment for patient, call patient to inform them of date/time, schedule transportation if needed.
	Patient 2 – patient was discharged home following a 4-day hospital admission; call patient to check on the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Did they pick up any new meds from the pharmacy?</li> <li>• Is there food in the house?</li> <li>• Has the transition of care appointment been scheduled, and does transportation need to be arranged?</li> </ul>
9:45am – 10:00am	Travel to community stakeholder meeting.
10:00am – 11:00am	Local community stakeholder meeting.
11:00am – 12:30pm	Patient 3 home visit – assist patient with completing SNAP application, drop off application at social services on return to the hospital.
1:00pm – 1:30pm	Meet with social work about new referrals.
1:30pm – 2:30pm	Meet patient 4 at her new patient ENT appointment.
2:30pm – 3:15pm	Patient 5 – meet with patient (new referral) to complete questionnaires.
3:15pm – 3:45pm	Patient 6 – Care team meeting with patient 6 and spouse, PCP and nutritionist to discuss diabetes management.
3:45pm – 5:00pm	Complete progress notes, upload documents from new referral, prep for tomorrow's visits.

Community health workers help patients (and sometimes families) navigate complex systems using a personalized approach. They are trusted liaisons that help bridge gaps for underserved or under resourced patients, providing outreach, education, social support and advocacy. Community health workers enhance management of chronic disease to achieve better health outcomes, reduce costs at the hospital level, and build stronger communities. The role of a CHW is unique and is one that meets the patient where they are.